

Letter from Taizé

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Graduate Theological Union

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2 and 3



The summer OCT 19 1989 in Taizé

For the first time, young people from certain Eastern European countries will be able to come in large numbers to a European meeting. To be more attentive to their expectations, here are two reports:

Making trust possible

During the summer months, the weeks of meetings that followed one another in Taizé seem to have formed a single event, an event both joyful and profound, with the wealth of all the nations present and the secret of silence where each person found themselves face to face with themselves and with God. Even though summer is over, the meetings are continuing until November.

"My discovery in prayer," wrote one of the participants, "was to realize that stopping three times a day for no particular reason was not a waste of time but a way of recognizing in the depths of my heart a longing that comes from elsewhere, a space where God can unveil his gift and cause trust and communion to grow. I was surprised to find myself, thanks to the support of a community, waiting for God in silence and song."

During a week spent living together in great simplicity of means, the other surprising thing is to find ourselves daring to go towards others, forgetting the prejudices and the precautions that ordinarily inhibit us. This year, there was an even greater openness, not only because of the number of the participants (an average of 20% more than last year) but also because of their origins.

The presence of Eastern Europe has become more and more visible. Week after week, the young people from Poland would speak to other Europeans about the next European meeting, to be held at the end of December in Wrocław, Poland, the first time ever in an Eastern European country. One day, a group of Rumanians arrived unannounced. At the end of August Metropolitan Philarete, the man in charge of external affairs for the patriarchate of Moscow, came with a delegation of three other persons. He wanted to express the gratefulness of the Russian Orthodox Church for Taizé's sending a million New Testaments that arrived in Russia last March.

The number of young people from other continents has also grown larger, so that there are more than sixty different nationalities present each week. Every day, young people from the Southern continents transmit their hope: by daring to take initiatives in very difficult situations, they confirm the incredible creativity of those who choose to walk with Christ.

Each week during the summer, several bishops or Church leaders were in Taizé. Usually they remained for a few days and thus were able to see what was happening in the intercontinental meetings. Some came from nearby countries, from most of the nations of Europe. Others came from further away: Indonesia, India, Algeria, the United States... Some of them brought with them a concern for the trials their country is undergoing, for example Colombia or Lebanon, and asked the young people to remember their countries in their prayers. ■

"The most urgent thing at present is to leave behind the mistrust that is dominant in our society. People are used to living with barriers and divisions, in a climate of fear. The first step is to abandon our reflexes of mistrust. Then, we can try to take steps toward one another to make trust possible.

"In the life of Christians, divisions are perpetuated by the constant control exercised by the state. It happens that those who are most active and who are working for reconciliation are penalized. But in recent days, some of those in charge have dared to take courageous steps.

"Because the government can paralyze the life of the Churches, many people meet together in small, spontaneous groups. But how then can a transformation of Church structures become possible? How can new life be awakened instead within these structures, since their role should be to foster communion? We are aware of the danger of isolation, when groups criticize from without and withdraw into themselves, thinking they are better than others.

"In such a context, places where all can come are very important. This sometimes means families that open their homes. These spaces of welcome give an image of the Church that is not cut off from the world, where the fear of others can vanish, where even non-believers can come freely. There is a great thirst for God, and we are astonished to see so many people discover faith practically by themselves, but they have so few roots that it is essential to find Christian communities that are welcoming, that respect each individual.

"In this search for a communion, we also want to be attentive to the poorest of the poor, for example those who are most isolated, such as handicapped persons. We are discovering that communion can be deepened only if every person finds his or her place, only if each person welcomes others.

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Making trust possible

"If many of us devote time to regular prayer, sometimes with much silence, that is because we know how important inner peace is. It enables us to leave behind the way of viewing things that comes from our society with its barriers and divisions. The yes of the Gospel affects our whole life, not just our private life. We say yes to hope, because of Christ, in an environment where discouragement and passivity reign. And we want to say yes to all that enhances the dignity of the human person, whether a believer or not, knowing that each person carries within them seeds of a springtime for the human family."

"Like the meeting in Pécs, I hope that the European meeting in Wrocław will help bring East and West closer together in Europe. There are still many prejudices, and to bring about trust, misunderstandings must be overcome."

"When people in my country see the wealth and affluence in the West, they think that the people must be better there. When we meet, we can see that we are not so different from one another, that no one can claim to know how to live better than the others. It is important as well that people from the West see the changes that are taking place in our countries."

"I have great expectations regarding the times of common prayer. They are a sign of the life of Christ. And I am very hopeful when I think of all who will come together from so many different countries. So many links, so many relationships will be created across national boundaries! The experience people have will mark them for life and influence their future work."

European meeting in Wrocław

We do not take part in this pilgrimage only by going to Wrocław, but also by making our whole lives a pilgrimage with Christ. The preparation is not only material; it involves above all a time of reflection on one's own life and that of one's group or community.

In each region, it would be a good idea to get together several times to pray and to reflect together. Why not propose as well on these occasions a kind of little pilgrimage to be undertaken in one's own local situation (visiting foreigners, other parishes, lonely people...)?

For the preparation of the meeting in Wrocław, here are some themes for reflection in addition to practical suggestions and questions. These proposals can be used, after making the necessary changes, by those who are not able to go to Wrocław but who wish to take part in the pilgrimage of trust on earth.

Pilgrimage...

Each year, Polish people by the thousands go on pilgrimage, for example to Czestochowa. Some walk up to 500 km in the course of a fortnight. The meeting in Wrocław is also a pilgrimage. How can we live it in this spirit, so familiar to the young people of Poland?

Journeying together means confronting the same difficulties, depending on one another and thus overcoming our individual weaknesses. Do we know how to pool our abilities to cope with difficulties? In the face of obstacles, are we open and attentive enough to depend upon one another?

The pilgrimage takes place in an atmosphere of constant prayer; it is in itself a prayer. What helps us to return to prayer over and over again, alone and with others? When we join different communities for prayer, can we share with them our search for reconciliation?

... of trust...

How can we take the first step to leave mistrust behind, to see others in a different way? What opening can I make in the walls that divide us? Am I ready to give something of myself, of my time, of my energies?

How can we find the inner peace necessary to be bearers of peace around ourselves?

What groups do we have little or no contact with? How can we visit them, invite them to visit us?

When there are meetings and celebrations to create links between groups in the same neighborhood or region, how can we take part? If such meetings do not exist, what can we do about it?

... across the earth

To come to Wrocław, some people will have to cross many frontiers. The meeting itself will be a parable of the universality of the Church. How can our Christian communities take part in this search for trust between peoples?

Are our communities present enough in situations of suffering and discrimination in our societies?

By what concrete acts of solidarity can we transmit hope to those who are most lacking in it?

"The walls that separated us are less sturdy than we thought."

Dates: Arrive Thursday morning, 28 Dec. 1989 between 7am and 12 noon. Depart mid-afternoon, Tuesday 2 January 1990.

Accommodation: in parishes, with families and communities. Simple conditions. Bring sleeping-bag and lightweight mattress.

General Programme: We will be welcomed by families and local church communities throughout the city. In each neighbourhood there will be a morning prayer, then meetings in small groups and visits to people with an involvement in the local area. Each day two common prayers for everyone in city-centre churches; in the afternoon, workshops on different themes.

17 to 29 year olds: three different ways of taking part: — the main group: participation in the life of the parishes of the city.

— the silence group (has separate accommodation). — while still participating in the life of the parishes, helping with practical work for the meeting, or "animation", or music for the common prayers. To do this, arrive, if possible, on December 26 between 8am and 4pm. It is not possible to arrive on Dec. 27.

15 & 16 year olds can only take part if accompanied by a group leader over 20 who stays with them, and all participate in the main group (see above) from 28 Dec. on (do not arrive before).

Adults over 30 all participate in the main group (see above) from 28 December on (do not arrive before). Those who cannot stay in the same simple conditions as the young people and need a "real bed" indicate this on their registration form. Those who are accompanying a group of young people are welcome to stay with them if they will accept the same simple accommodation.

Families with children, and people with a disability who need special accommodation should register directly to Taizé — best by telephone in October or November — to arrange suitable accommodation.

Your contribution to cost covers all meals during the meeting and a public transport pass. It is not yet possible to say the exact contribution which will be expected from each participant, but it will be in the region of £30 (changed into US Dollars before leaving home).

Visa: To obtain a visa, each participant needs a full passport valid until late 1990. **Apply well in advance.** — *In Ireland*, for all visa formalities, contact CYC, 20-23 Arran Quay, DUBLIN 7. Tel: (01) 725055.

— *In Britain:* Polish Consulate Visa Section, 19 Weymouth Street, LONDON W1N 3AG. Tel: 01 580 0476. The visa costs £15. The consulate needs: passport, 2 photos, £15 visa fee, completed visa application form, s.a.e. (stamps to cover registered mail for the return of your passport). On the visa application form, question 11 (Purpose of journey) should be answered as follows: "Taizé European Meeting", and question 12 (Place of stay): "Parishes of Wroclaw". These two answers are vital so that you receive a visa exempt from any currency exchange requirement. If you do not receive this exemption it should be queried immediately. It is possible to go to the visa section in person with one's application, it is open 9am to 4pm. There is also a visa office in Edinburgh.

Travel — from Britain: 1. Group travel from London via Ostend, linking up with a special train for Wroclaw starting in Cologne. Departure from London, late evening 26th December. Approx. cost: £120 return.

2. Charter flight. Departure from London probably evening 27th December. Approx. cost: £200 return.

3. Early departure for helpers, 26th December, probably a group ticket on a scheduled flight from London to Warsaw. Cost: probably more than the charter flight.

All details from: St Peter's Coaches, 87a Rushey Green, LONDON SE6 2BC. Tel: 01 698 9145 Fax: 01 697 2466 Telex: 268506. **Book well in advance.** Deadline for booking likely to be end-November. Mention whether you are more interested in the train, the plane or the helpers departure.

— *from Ireland:* Charter flight being arranged from Shannon airport. Contact CYC, 20-23 Arran Quay, DUBLIN 7. Tel: (01) 725055.

— *from other countries:* write to Taizé for information.

Send in your registration form by 1 December at the latest. Fuller information will be sent in November to those who have already registered. Please be careful to register to the right place: — Families with children; people with special accommodation needs; anyone living outside Ireland or Britain — these three sets of people should register directly to Taizé: European Meeting, Taizé Community, 71250 CLUNY, France. Tel: 85.50.18.18 — People who live in Ireland (except the above) register to: CYC, 20-23 Arran Quay, DUBLIN 7. Tel: (01) 725055. — People who live in Britain (except the above) register to the nearest contact person: see list, page 7.

There were many young Polish people in Taizé this summer, and some of them expressed their expectations concerning Wroclaw in these words:

"Many of us need to become more open to the outside world. The walls that separated us are less sturdy than we thought. Among the thousands of young adults who cross the borders of our country, some go to look for work, some to discover other countries, and then there are those who, like us, go to spend a week or two in Taizé because they want to pray and meet other Christians.

"When we leave home, we continue to be concerned about all our difficulties, so much so that we think that we are the only ones who have any. The first surprise we find in the meetings in Taizé is that other people have problems too, and try not to be overcome by discouragement.

"We are even more astonished when we discover the expectations others have of us. Many people try to understand how our simple faith and our attachment to the Church have permitted us to resist. That leads us to ask ourselves: after this period when we had to live in solidarity in our difficulties, will we be able to renew our faith and our attachment to the Church in order to build together?

"We will all come to Wroclaw as pilgrims. Some will undoubtedly come bearing the weight of their struggle to defend the treasure of the presence of Christ in the midst of the greyness of daily life. Others will carry the concern of being signs of that presence in the midst of doubt and indifference. We can already see that, by entrusting these burdens to Christ in prayer, and by sharing what keeps us going, roads will open up which will lead us very far together." □

European Meeting Registration Form. Send in by December 1st.

FIRST NAME :

FAMILY NAME :

ADDRESS :

(with post code and country)

Tel.:/..... Occupation: Age:

Circle "Yes" or "No" or complete where necessary:

- I am coming with a group from the town of led by
- For adults (over 30 years) and those who cannot sleep on the floor:
I need a bed: yes / no : If "yes", say whether you are (please circle):
woman man couple family with ... children disabled person with helper
- I will arrive on 28th December: yes / no (arrival between 7am and 12pm)
- I will arrive on 26th December (17-30 year olds only): yes / no
to help with (please circle): animation / work / music team.
- N.B. If, for any reason, you are arranging your own accommodation in Wroclaw, please send us the address and, if possible, the name of the parish where you will stay.
- I would like ... more registration forms (photocopy your own if possible)

"Lord, teach us to pray"

Here is the fifth Bible introduction on the Lord's Prayer, given each morning in Taizé by one of the brothers of the community. During the inter-continental meetings, one of the choices offered to participants is that of taking part in a week spent reflecting on the Bible.

"...on earth as it is in heaven"

When we begin to read the Lord's Prayer, the first words, "Our Father", place us at the heart of the Gospel: through Christ and the gift of his Spirit, we enter into a new relationship with God which leads immediately to a new relationship among human beings.

But this new relationship of trust and love is not a privilege reserved for a select few. The following petitions express the widening of this relationship to all humanity. We ask God to reveal his true identity (his Name) to all, so that all can live according to his will which is love. The final words of this first part of the prayer sum up well its significance: "on earth as it is in heaven".

Heaven stands for God; what we are asking for, then, is for the reality of God to inundate the earth more and more, for his love to transform an indifferent or hostile world into a Kingdom of justice and peace. This full communion between heaven and earth began with the coming of the Son of God as one of us. It continues in the existence of the community of believers, the Church, a people of priests (cf. 1 Peter 2,5,9; Ex 19,6) that shares the mission of Christ to extend this communion to "the ends of the earth" (cf. Acts 1,8).

We have also seen that this prayer is at the same time a commitment. It is as if we said to God, "Take my life so that, through me, something of your love, of your light, can shine on others. Enable me to reveal your Life through my own existence."

Aware of our weakness, of our limits, how can we dare make such a commitment? Where would we find the strength to live it out?

The answer to this question is given in the second part of the prayer. There, we shift from "you (thou)" to "us". But we do not ask for something for ourselves in a self-centred way. On the contrary, we ask for all we need to live out the commitment we have taken in the first part of the prayer. The Our Father is one prayer, not two: we ask for what we need in order to share in the mission of Christ, to set out on the road with him.

"Give us this day our daily bread (tomorrow's bread)"

The first of the great gifts that we ask of God is bread. The word "bread" in Hebrew means all that is necessary for life: food, shelter, clothing... And the Bible assures us that, although human beings must work to earn their bread (Gen 3,17-19), God is the true source of it: "God gives bread to every creature; his love endures forever!" (Ps 136,25; cf. 107,9; 22,26).

Several Bible texts can help us to understand the meaning of this petition. Two different translations are possible: "today's bread" or "tomorrow's bread". Chapter 16 of the Book of Exodus describes the Israelites in a difficult situation on the road to the Promised Land. They are hungry, and so they begin to criticize Moses and Aaron, but in fact they are angry with God.

Then the miracle takes place. A kind of food falls on the ground during the night, a "bread" that the people call "manna". This bread is something material: it nourishes the starving multitude and enables them to continue on their pilgrimage.

But it is also something more. It comes from heaven, in other words directly from God. And the story tells us that it tasted like honey (v. 31). In the Bible, honey reminds us inevitably of the Promised Land, "land of milk and honey". The manna is thus a kind of foretaste of the Promised Land; it is "tomorrow's bread" that suddenly appears in the people's today to give them courage on their journey.

Another detail is important here. The manna makes possible a miraculous experience of sharing, of perfect solidarity. We read that "those who gathered much did not have too much, and those who gathered little did not have too little. Each one gathered as much as they needed" (v. 18). There in the desert, we see an anticipation of the Kingdom of God, a world of perfect justice.

Another passage (Matt 4,2-4) tells of Jesus in the desert. He too is hungry, so the Tempter tries to separate him from his Father by enticing him to solve his problem by counting on his own powers. Instead of living in trust, he is tempted to perform impressive acts of power. And Jesus replies with simple words from Scripture: "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."

This quotation in fact refers to the manna in the wilderness. Jesus does not, therefore, distinguish material food and spiritual nourishment from God, as one might imagine at first glance. Jesus does not claim that people can live without bread, but he points to trust in God as the true source of all we need, both materially and spiritually.

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Johannine hours

Jeremiah 9,23-24

Johannine hours are suggested as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer, in the midst of our life at home. During the course of the day take a couple of hours to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, the group (3 to 10 people) meet together to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

In the final analysis, where do we find our security? In whom or what do we place our trust? The prophet Jeremiah had to deal with these questions in a critical moment of the life of his people. All round him, he saw his compatriots counting upon their gifts of intelligence, strength or their possessions. Personally, the prophet had nothing against these human realities, but he realized that the time would come when they would no longer suffice for the people to cope with their situation, to find a meaning in their life. Night would fall, when human hands and eyes would no longer be of use, when certainties would vanish. Then, all that would be left would be the rock of knowledge of God.

What is this knowledge so essential for life? For Jeremiah, it is an attitude of the heart, with nothing theoretical about it. It is rooted in the depths of the human being, and involves a basic choice, a saying yes with one's whole life. Knowledge of God leads directly to a way of life, to doing good (cf. Jer 4,22), to taking care of those in need (22,15f).

How can the knowledge of God be acquired? Jeremiah knows that, when all is said and done, it is a gift from God (24,7), since only God can transform human hearts. Our role is to welcome this gift by an attitude of trust. Only this trust enables us to go forward in the darkest hours of the night, to discern in the events of the world and of our lives the face of a God who "exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth".

Where do I find security? How can we view our personal qualities not as ways of justifying or defending ourselves but as gifts of God that must grow and bear fruit?

How can I penetrate beneath the surface of events to discern what God is accomplishing in my own life and in the human family?

These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.

1 Wed Mt 5.1-12 ALL SAINTS

How great a love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called God's children. And that is what we are! 1 Jn 3.1-3

2 Thu Lk 12.35-40

The Lord has destroyed the veil of mourning that enfolded all peoples. He has swallowed up death forever. **Ls 25.6-9**

3 Fri Mt 18.12-14

Paul writes: The law of the Spirit, which gives life in Christ Jesus, has set you free from the law of sin and death. **Rm 8.1-4**

4 Sat Mt 18.15-18

The Spirit seeks life and peace. **Rm 8.5-11**

5 SUN Ws 11.23-12.2 2 Th 1.11-2.2

Jesus said: The Son of man has come to seek out and save what was lost. **Lk 19.1-10**

6 Mon Rm 8.12-13

Jesus said: When two or three meet in my name, I am there among them. **Mt 18.19-20**

7 Tue Mt 18.21-22

Above all else, watch over your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. **Pr 4.18,20-27**

8 Wed Mt 18.23-35

Paul writes: The whole of creation has been groaning as in labour pains up to the present time. And not only that: we too, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait with eagerness for our redemption. **Rm 8.18-23**

9 Thu Pr 8.22-23,27-31

Jesus said to a rich young man: If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me. **Mt 19.13-22**

10 Fri Mt 19.23-26

We do not know how to pray properly, but the Spirit comes to help us in our weakness and intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. **Rm 8.26-28**

November

11 Sat Rm 8.31-39

Jesus said: Anyone who leaves home, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children or fields for my sake will receive much more and will inherit eternal life. **Mt 19.27-39**

12 SUN 2 M 7.1-14 2 Th 2.16-3.5

Having told the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus asked the teacher of the law, "Who showed themselves to be a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" He replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." **Lk 10.27-38**

13 Mon Mt 20.1-16

Let your heart remain constant in the adoration of God; for there is a future and your hope will not come to nothing. **Pr 23.15-18**

14 Tue Mt 20.17-23

The Word of God is very near you, it is on your lips and in your heart. **Rm 10.8-10**

15 Wed Rm 11.29,33-36

Jesus said: The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. **Mt 20.24-28**

16 Thu Mt 20.29-34

Do not model yourselves on the pattern of this world, but let yourselves be transformed by the renewing of your mind so that you may discern the will of God. **Rm 12.1-3**

17 Fri Mt 21.1-11

Paul writes: When you give, give generously, from the heart; when you do works of mercy, do so with joy. **Rm 12.5-8**

18 Sat Mt 21.12-17

Be joyful in your hope, steadfast in hardship, faithful in prayer. Be always ready to offer hospitality. **Rm 12.9-13**

19 SUN Mt 13.19-20 2 Th 3.7-12

Jesus said to his disciples: You will be persecuted because of my name. But make up your mind not to worry about how to defend yourselves, for I shall give you words and wisdom. **Lk 21.12-19**

20 Mon Rm 12.14-17

Jesus said: If you have faith, everything you ask for in prayer, you will receive. **Mt 21.21-27**

Meditating on the Word

21 Tue Mt 21.28-32

Sing and rejoice, my people, for I am coming to live among you, says the Lord. **Zc 2.14-17**

22 Wed Mt 21.33-46

Paul writes: Let us put aside the deeds of darkness. Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ. **Rm 13.11-14**

23 Thu Mt 22.1-10

While we live, as when we die, we belong to the Lord. For Christ died and returned to life that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. **Rm 14.7-10**

24 Fri Mt 22.15-22

The Lord says: I shall save you and you will be a blessing. Do not be afraid! **Zc 8.12-13**

25 Sat Rm 15.1-6

Jesus said: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is similar: Love your neighbour as yourself. **Mt 22.31-40**

26 SUN 2 S 5.1-3 Col 1.12-20

The criminal said to Jesus, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "In truth I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise." **Lk 23.35-43**

27 Mon Rm 15.7-13

Jesus said: The greatest among you will be your servant. **Mt 23.1-11**

28 Tue Mt 24.1-14

Cry out and rejoice, for your king is approaching. He is just and victorious, humble and riding on a donkey. **Zc 9.9-10**

29 Wed Mt 24.23-27

The Lord says: When that day comes, a fountain will be opened for my people and it will wash away sin and impurity. **Zc 13.1-2**

30 Thu Rm 10.10-15

St ANDREW
Jesus saw Simon and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Come follow me, and I will make you fishers of people." And at once they left their nets and followed him. **Mt 4.18-22**

These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.

December

1 Fri Rm 16.25-27
Jesus said: Sky and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. **Mt 24.32-36**

2 Sat Mt 3.1,23-24
Jesus said: In truth I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me. **Mt 25.34-40**

3 SUN Is 2.1-5
Rm 13.11-14
ADVENT
Jesus said to his disciples: Stand ready, because the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect. **Mt 24.37-44**

4 Mon Is 1.2-18
The crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God for all the miracles they had seen. They cried out: Blessed is the one who comes as king in the name of the Lord! **Lk 19.28-40**

5 Tue Lk 20.37-40
Paul writes: Despite great suffering, you welcomed the Word of God with the joy of the Holy Spirit, and so you became an model for all believers. **1 Th 1.4-7**

6 Wed Lk 21.29-33
God has entrusted us with the Gospel, and so we preach, not trying to please people but God who knows our hearts. **1 Th 2.2-7**

7 Thu Is 5.1-4
John the Baptist said, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert: Make straight the way of the Lord!" **Jn 1.19-23**

8 Fri Is 43.1
Mary said to the angel: I am the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said. **Lk 1.26-38**

9 Sat 1 Th 3.11-13
Mary said: The Lord's merciful love stretches from age to age upon those who revere him. **Lk 1.46-50**

10 SUN Is 11.1-4
Rm 15.4-9
John the Baptist came as the prophet Isaiah had said: A voice of one calling in the desert, "Prepare the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight." **Mt 3.1-12**

11 Mon Mt 18.12-14
Isaiah said: When he laid his hand upon me, God told me, "Do not fear all that people fear. Do not be afraid. I am the one whom you are to regard as holy." **Is 8.11-18**

12 Tue Lk 7.18-23
Paul writes: It is God's will that you should be made holy. **1 Th 4.3-9**

13 Wed Is 11.10-11a
Jesus said: As the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. **Jn 5.19-21**

14 Thu Jn 5.33-36
You are children of light, children of the day. So let us not slumber but stay awake and sober. **1 Th 5.1-6**

15 Fri Lk 1.5-10
God has offered us salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that, whether we live or die, we may live united with to him. **1 Th 5.9-15**

16 Sat Lk 1.11-17
I will trust and not be afraid, for God is my strength and my song. **Is 12.2-6**

17 SUN Is 35.1-6,10
Jm 5.7-10
Jesus said of John the Baptist: He is the one of whom scripture says: Look, I am going to send my messenger before you to prepare your way. **Mt 11.2-11**

18 Mon Lk 1.18-22
On that day, it will be said: Look, this is our God; we put our hope in him and he saved us. Let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation. **Is 25.9-10a**

19 Tue Lk 1.39-45
May God fulfill every good purpose of yours by his power and complete all that you have been doing by faith. **2 Th 1.11-12**

20 Wed Lk 1.57-66
Lord, you establish peace for us. All that we have accomplished, you have done for us. **Is 26.12-13,19**

21 Thu 2 Th 2.13-14
Zechariah prophesied: Blessed be the Lord, for he has visited and redeemed his people, and established for us a power of salvation. **Lk 1.67-71**

22 Fri Lk 1.72-79
May our Lord Jesus Christ, and God our Father who has given us his love and, through his grace, such ceaseless encouragement and sure hope, encourage and strengthen you in every good word and deed. **2 Th 2.15-17**

Meditating on the Word

23 Sat Lk 1.51-56
The Lord says: See, I am laying a foundation stone for my people. And I will take justice for a measure and righteousness as a level. **Is 28.16-17a**

24 SUN Mt 1.18-24 Is 9.1-6
Tt 2.11-14
The angel of the Lord said to the shepherds: Do not be afraid. I bring you news of a great joy, a joy to be shared by all the people: today a Saviour has been born to you, he is Christ the Lord. **Lk 2.1-14**

25 Mon Is 52.7-10
Heb 1.1-6
CHRISTMAS
When they had seen Jesus, the shepherds made known what they had been told concerning him and everyone who heard was astonished. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. **Lk 2.15-20**

26 Tue Mt 10.17-22
St STEPHEN
As they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, then in a loud voice he cried out: Lord, do not hold this sin against them. **Ac 7.55-60**

27 Wed Jn 20.2-8
St JOHN
Life itself became visible, we saw it and testify to it. We proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was revealed to us. **1 Jn 1.1-4**

28 Thu Is 30.15a
Jesus said: The coming of the kingdom of God cannot be observed, for the kingdom of God is among you. **Lk 17.20-21**

29 Fri 1 K 19.9-13
God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. **Jn 3.16-17**

30 Sat Mt 7.7-11
Our predecessors in faith recognized that they were exiles and nomads on this earth. In this way, they showed clearly that they were in search of their real homeland. And god has prepared a city for them. **Heb 11.13-16**

31 SUN Mt 5.3-10
Paul writes: I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the communion in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. **Ph 3.10-14**

Johannine hours

1 Peter 2,21-25

Johannine hours are suggested as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer, in the midst of our life at home. During the course of the day take a couple of hours to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, the group (3 to 10 people) meet together to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

In what way is the passion and death of Jesus a source of life for us? Suffering in itself has no power to liberate, for how could the Lord of life approve of anyone's pain, especially that of his own beloved Son?

In this passage, the apostle Peter reveals the secret to us in these words: "when he was insulted, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats" (v. 23). The passion of Jesus is the site of a mysterious exchange: by responding to human hatred with forgiveness and love, Jesus transformed the torture of the cross into a road to life. If he had fought against his adversaries using the same weapons as they, Jesus would only have caused the spiral of violence to grow greater. Even his own innocence could have become such a weapon, if he had used it as a pretext to justify himself and to exalt himself at others' expense.

By responding to evil with good, Jesus took from evil its power to harm. Evil was overcome by love; in the words of Saint Paul, "he put hatred to death" (Eph 2,16). Jesus, the most innocent of all human beings, lived in an authentic solidarity with us, and in this way he did the only thing that could bend human freedom frozen into an attitude of revolt, of false autonomy. This love put us back on the right path.

In what way did Christ return good for evil? What use did he make of his innocence? How is his behaviour in this respect a "model" for us?

What does the life and death of Christ tell us about human solidarity? With whom am I called to live in solidarity? How?

How can we, in the footsteps of Christ, transform the meaning of suffering by the way we deal with it?

The Lord's Prayer

continued from page 4

Finally, chapter 6 of John's Gospel shows a great crowd of people following Jesus to a lonely place. Jesus feeds them miraculously, by multiplying five loaves. Once again, this is material food, but allusions to the Sinai story and to the Passover point at the same time to a reality of another order. That becomes explicit in the following discourse. Jesus says to the crowds, "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you" (v. 27). Then he explains that he is the true manna, the bread from God that gives life to the world.

And, at the end, his words become even more concrete and shocking: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (v. 53). The disciples will understand these words fully only after the resurrection. Then they will realize that Jesus was speaking about his life given on the cross, a life transmitted to us, in the sacrament of the Eucharist, by communion in that body given up for us and that blood shed for us.

In all these texts, bread is a material reality that points beyond itself to a reality of another order, to God as the Source of our life. The Bible does not separate the material and the spiritual in order to take refuge in the latter. The Biblical vision is different: it allows us to glimpse, behind the things of this world, the presence of God that gives support and meaning to it all. It points to communion with God, trust in God, as the basic reality that sustains us on our pilgrimage on this earth. □

Jesus Christ,
even when we feel
nothing of your presence,
you are always there.
You clothe us in your presence
as in a garment.
In us, your Holy Spirit
remains constantly active,
opening little ways forward
beyond our dead ends
and enabling us to advance
towards the essential of faith,
of trust.

prayer by Brother Roger

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Two brothers of Taizé will be in Britain in February 1990 for a series of meetings. For details, send s.a.e. to Jean Fletcher, 50 Beverley Close, Rainham, GILLINGHAM, Kent, ME8 9HQ.



Listening to the CONTINENTS

Philippines

Small Christian communities

One of the workshops offered in Taizé at the end of the week was on the topic: "Small Christian communities, how to begin them, how to continue them, what links with the parish?" Young people from Southern continents introduced the two afternoons of reflection and sharing. Bruce, from the Philippines, described his experience in this way:

"A phrase from the Letter from Russia, «Beauty ancient and ever new», expresses well what many Christians experience who belong to a small Christian community. This experience of life together goes back to the first Christians. It is very ancient and yet it remains alive and full of dynamism today.

"These communities are made up of Christians who meet to listen to the Word of God, share the Eucharist and pray together.

"In my country, in the region of Davao, these small communities have an important place to discern and reveal the signs of the presence of the Kingdom of God, to build up the Church and give it new life. They are the place where lay people can commit themselves and they have given many a new awareness of belonging to the Church.

"Each parish is surrounded by forty or fifty communities each composed of twenty or thirty families. Each community has four animators with different responsibilities.

"One prepares the prayer and the songs, another is in charge of material questions of the community, including preparing the meeting place, a third takes care of the teaching of the faith to the community, and finally someone else is responsible for welcoming young people in the community.

"These small communities are made up of ordinary people: farmers, fishermen, office workers... They are never closed groups because a constant attempt is made to keep up contacts with neighboring communities and with the local parish.

"The parish priest is surrounded by a pastoral team that calls together all those in charge of the small communities for meetings of sharing and formation.

"In a chapel built in their neighborhood by the members of the community, people meet once a week for a liturgy of the Word, songs of praise, a Bible sharing and a prayer of intercession. Usually, news is then shared; people look for ways of helping someone who is ill or who cannot afford medicine. Activities for the coming weeks are prepared.

"This common prayer has helped us to deal with a great many difficulties in our lives. When confronted with a catastrophe or another problem, people come together to pray and to ask for God's help. The popular movement that enabled Marcos to be overthrown is the clearest example of this."

One of the questions to continue a time of sharing in small groups was this: How, in a completely different context, can we renew the face of the Church, that community that brings together all the generations, that offers hospitality, that prays, that is attentive and caring? ■

India

A simple life like Christ's

Young people from India were numerous in Taizé this summer. Here are some excerpts from things they said:

"I am always searching in my life for the way of God along which I can commit myself totally. In my country many young people, women and children are exploited and illiterate. By sharing with them a simple life like Christ's who lived in a carpenter's family, I can become a sign in the human family."

A girl adds: "I would like to gather together the young people of my parish who, because of different misunderstandings, are split up into small groups. Even if I am alone, I realize that my commitment consists in loving and serving faithfully, and that I am called to live this out with those who are nearby."

The commitment to live as part of the Church is important for them: "Praying together in the midst of crises that shake the human family is a source of hope. A simple common prayer gives us support and trust in God who shares our history. It helps us grow and understand what the Church is."

"I work with the young people of Madhyapradesh. I would like those I meet every day to discover the treasure hidden in the depths of the word of God, to proclaim my faith by a form of witness where silence has its place. I would like to live out my convictions with compassion, by respecting differences of caste, language and religion."

USA and Canada

MARY, MOTHER OF RECONCILIATIONS

by
Mother Teresa of Calcutta
and
Brother Roger of Taizé

"We, all of us, can bring the love of Jesus to others and become a ferment of reconciliation, not only among believers, but in the entire human family...And Mary will become for us "mother of reconciliations".

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